

# MYTHOLOGIES OF THE TERRORIST WAR

by

S. MONICK, B.A., A.L.A.

Charles Lamb once wrote a highly entertaining essay on popular fallacies. Today, I am reminded of this essay whenever I survey the interpretation of the terrorist war in Southern Africa by the press media of the United Kingdom, the United States, Western Europe and, indeed, of South Africa. For in its relation to African affairs generally, and to the conflict in the Zambezi salient specifically, such media has created an insidious body of mythology, the ultimate object of which is to destroy and subvert morale in Rhodesia and South Africa.

In this article I will discuss three fundamental assumptions concerning the terrorist war made by the enemies of white Southern Africa, and hope to expose their inherent contradictions and falsity.

**1. That there is no ultimate defence against terrorism:** This is certainly true if there is a climate of opinion among ruling political circles which naturally gravitates towards anarchy and the collapse of civilized government. For one fundamental truth of counter-insurgency warfare must be grasped - terrorism can never succeed militarily, only psychologically. That it has succeeded psychologically in all the former British territories is due primarily to the cult of appeasement and capitulation which has dominated British foreign policy since the last war. This cult is the culminating point of two generations of moral exhaustion which followed the First World War: an exhaustion which was presaged by the total collapse of the British territories in the Far East - after feeble and incompetent resistance - in the face of the Japanese onslaught in 1942. One may trace this consistent theme of capitulation in a chain of events extending throughout India, Burma, Egypt, Palestine, Aden and - most recently - Ulster. A vivid illustration of this syndrome occurred in a comment by "The Times" of London, last year. In commenting upon the success of IRA terrorism, it attributed - quite correctly - such success to the fact that the British Army, in encountering urban terrorism, was hampered by the fact that it fought with one hand tied behind its back; then added - in its most sanctimonious and self-righteous manner - that it was just and right that this should be the case.

Western military machines have hardly ever devised successful means of coping with terrorism. The reasons for this are somewhat complex. The first answer is implicit in the psychological fabric of the political circles ultimately controlling operations. One has the predisposed will to surrender, discussed above. This helplessness of metropolitan European governments in the face of terrorist disruption is not, of course, confined to Britain. As recent events have shown, the Portuguese will to resist these pressures in Angola and Mozambique has been paralysed by this contagion of a negative political approach for a decade; the coup d'etat in April, 1974, embodied the ultimate triumph of this disease. This psychological depressant activates a technological failure. An arch-military conservatism develops which is embodied in a blind adaption of European

patterns of warfare (in the form of ponderous armour or static heavily fortified garrisons) to jungle terrain and evasive guerrilla tactics. The result is an increasing defeatism on the part of the military, and, ultimately, fatalism. (This was the case with the Portuguese in Mozambique, the French in Indo-China, and the Americans in Vietnam). In short, an initial political defeatism infiltrates the military arm. Military conservatism, moreover, yields a highly expensive form of warfare which places an ever-increasing strain upon the metropolitan government's economy, thereby ultimately yielding to a frame of mind which considers overseas wars as expensive luxuries. ( In point of fact they are anything but luxuries. For example, the economic and political blackmail exerted upon the West by the Middle East oil states, with their strangle-hold on oil supplies, is a direct consequence upon the abdication of British power East of Suez). This was a major factor precipitating the American withdrawal from Vietnam, compounded by a mood of national defeatism accruing from American military incompetence and the agencies of subversion harboured by the Eastern "liberal" establishment; the most notable subversive agency being the news media.

The French in Indo-China, the Americans in Vietnam, the Portuguese in Mozambique, have all illustrated this military blindness. The French obsession with fortresses - extending in a chain of strategic thought linking Verdun with the Maginot line, and culminating in Dien Bien Phu - is a notable example. During the Vietnam war the continual condemnation by conventional army officers of the irregular methods of Special Forces personnel (the "Green Berets") operating in small groups, independent of lines of communication and the chain of command - is symptomatic of this peculiar military blindness. The particular American obsession in Vietnam was gross over-reliance upon highly sophisticated air power. Notable exceptions to this abysmal European record are the British success in Malaya against the Communist terrorists during the late 1940s, and the victory over the Mau Mau in Kenya in the early 1950s. These instances of flexible strategy - based upon a combination of highly mobile small columns combined with protected villages - clearly point to the methods by which terrorist insurgency can be contained.

To reiterate, militarily the terrorist can never win. Whilst he can never be totally destroyed (simply because he blends so perfectly into the civilian population) militarily he cannot destroy trained security forces. Frelimo, for example, could never have physically overcome 60,000 troops; its victory lay in the paralysis of the will to resist; a paralysis which resulted from a defeatism emerging from a totally unimaginative military approach. Had the Portuguese not placed their faith in a ponderous inflexible conscript army (which could have no real stake in Mozambique) instead of compact flexible forces drawn from the indigenous population (which would in fact have been defending its homeland) the result would have been very different.

Commenting upon this in a newspaper interview, Major Hoare (whose strategy of highly mobile flying columns in the Congo revealed an imaginative and highly intelligent military grasp of irregular warfare) stated that Frelimo would have been destroyed long ago by an imaginative and determined approach. Mozambique is becoming a pedestal for the school of thought which stresses the inevitability of the domino strategy, and which

thereby argues that there can be no ultimate defence against terrorism. For, this school of thought argues, if an army of 60 000 could not contain terrorism, how can the limited manpower resources of Rhodesia do so? The answer lies in the fundamentally false premise of the view that numbers are necessary to contain terrorism. To this school of thought I would reply that the deployment of large numbers is disastrous to successful COIN warfare. The absorption of increasing numbers of military personnel into terrain which renders conventional warfare impossible is the strategic objective of the terrorist, as it results in a profound dislocation of economic and political life. Viewed in this light, limited manpower resources are not a key to ultimate defeat, but to ultimate victory, as they necessitate tactical and strategic thought adapted to evasive guerrilla tactics.

## **2. That the problem of terrorism can only be resolved by compromise and**

**negotiation:** The answer to this perverse mythology was succinctly formulated in a speech by Lt. Gen. Walls on the 19th July: the essence of which was that terrorism is not a means to an end (an end which can be negotiated) - but a way of life (or rather anti-life). The second myth quoted above is continually fostered by the left-wing establishment in the West, which knows full well that compromise with terrorists - the implacable enemies of all civilized government, infused with racial hatred - can only be interpreted as appeasement, inevitably leading to ultimate surrender. The latest victim of this myth was General Spínola, who now, no doubt has ample time in his new Brazilian surroundings to reflect upon the shortcomings of his military-political philosophy. In his naive theorising about the "political" solution to Portugal's colonial wars, and a "multi-racial Lusitanian federation", he discounted a more vigorous and imaginative military approach. In my opinion, Spínola's strategy - or rather lack of it - emanated from the fact that he was a military conservative. As a traditional cavalry officer he could not control the new type of war which confronts the Zambezi salient; the conflict in which the enemy's assault is psychological, rather than representing the classical military configuration of attack and defence. He thus thought in the military vacuum which afflicted General Westmoreland and other commanders in Vietnam who, as officers in World War Two, were essentially orientated towards a war of mobility and clearly formulated objects of attack; a strategic approach of which armour was the chosen instrument. After four months of "negotiation" and political cant, the end product of such theorising has been outright surrender, and the familiar abandonment of Europeans in Mozambique and Angola to exile, dispossession and (with particular reference to Angola) all the horrors of another Congo. With regard to the former British territories, this conception of "compromise" abandoned Cyprus to the (still unresolved) tensions of alien national groups (the recent Graeco-Turkish conflict was ignited by these tensions), the Middle East to the perennial cycle of war - culminating in naked political blackmail of the West by oil producing states; whilst in Ulster it destroyed ordered government and left it completely vulnerable to the mutual terrorism of rival para-military groups.

## **3. That the terrorist war in the Zambezi salient represents a "national war of liberation" against the established government .**

That this is total rubbish can easily be proved by the fact that, as the Minister of Defence stated in a television interview on July 22, the largest number of atrocities have been committed against Africans (as was the case in Kenya during the Mau Mau emergency). In other words the people on whose

behalf the "insurrection" has been instigated are proving to be its major victims. This fact underscores the basic tenet that the terrorist is essentially a criminal (seeking influence and power within a chosen area with the familiar instruments of the criminal - terror and intimidation), and certainly not a soldier. Hostile news media seeks to identify the former with the latter. This is reflected in the wilful and glib confusion of the two terms "guerrilla" and "terrorist".

A guerrilla is essentially one who places a strain upon his opponent's conventional forces by a process of attrition - both psychological and physical; this process centring upon demoralising attacks - particularly upon supplies and lines of communication - whilst avoiding the classical military configuration. His enemy, however, remains his armed assailants. (This was the tactical philosophy of Von-Lettow Vorbeck, commanding the German forces in Tanganyika during the First World War, as well as Lawrence of Arabia). The terrorist's major object of attack is the civilian population within the theatre of operations. By a calculated process of intimidation and terror he seeks to undermine his assailant's authority within a chosen area. His attacks upon his assailant are, admittedly, based upon guerrilla tactics, but this is necessitated by a combination of numerical weakness and physical cowardice. His object of attack, however, is not so much the enemy itself but the prestige of that enemy within the eyes of the civilian population. In short, it is the object of attack and choice of amoral methods of persuasion as a chosen instrument of war which distinguishes the terrorist of today from the guerrilla fighters of the Boer War and of World Wars One and Two.

From my foregoing remarks, it is apparent that the enemy's major assault is not upon the physical forces of Rhodesia and South Africa, but rather upon the moral fibres of both nations. In this battle for the national mind the terrorist has some formidable allies; some unwitting (e.g. those who see compromise as the ultimate road to security), some conscious exponents of the terrorist's ideology (the most notable exponent is, of course, the English-speaking Press in South Africa). To such agencies of subversion, Cicero is the spiritual counterpart when he stated:

A nation can survive its fools, and even the ambitious. But it cannot survive treason from within. An enemy at the gates is less formidable, for he is known and carries his banners openly. But a traitor moves among those within the gate freely, and his sly whispers rustling through all the alleys are heard in the very halls of government itself. For the traitor appears no traitor; he speaks in accents familiar to their victims and wears their face and their garments, and appeals to the baseness which lies deep in the hearts of all men. He rots the soul of the nation; he infects the body politic so that it can no longer resist. A murderer is less to be feared.

It is another way of saying what the Prime Minister stated in a speech on July 22, that defeat can only come from within. Only when the shadowy and insubstantial basis of terrorist effectiveness can be shown for what it is - by that "reasoned assessment" of which General Walls spoke - can the battle be ultimately won.

Ministry of Information

Rhodesia, no date.

(Was reprinted from "Assegai", August, 1975.)